

Snow Hill
Laurel, Md.

Prince Georges Co.

HABS No. MD - 6612
HABS
MD.
17- LAUR.V
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Washington, D.C.

Historic American Buildings Survey
Delos H. Smith, District Officer
1707 Eye St., N.W., Washington, D.C.

HABS
MD
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2-

SNOW HILL
(Samuel Snowden-Long House)
13209 Laurel-Bowie Road
Laurel Vicinity
Prince Georges County
Maryland

HABS NO. MD-642

Addendum To:
Snow Hill
(Samuel Snowden House)
Laurel-Bowie (State Rt. 197) &
Contee Roads
Laurel Vicinity
Prince Georges County
Maryland

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SNOW HILL
(Samuel Snowden House)

HABS NO. MD-642

Location: 13209 Laurel-Contee Road (Rt. 197), Laurel,
Prince George's County, Maryland

Present Owner: Mr. Morris Warren (also current occupant)

Present Use: Private residence

Significance: Snow Hill is an excellent example of a dwelling executed in an architectural style popular during the period of early settlement in Prince George's County. Its one-and-a-half story, gambrel-roof configuration--a tradition of Southern Tidewater architecture--was once commonly found throughout the region. Being of brick construction, Snow Hill was of a more permanent nature than most of its kind which were executed in wood frame--few of which are therefore extant. The house is also significant as one of a number of homes of the prominent Snowden family who first settled in the Laurel area in 1690. Samuel Snowden, the builder of Snow Hill, was heir to a vast tract of land here (6,000 acres), as well as the Patuxent Iron Works, started by his father in 1726.

PART I, HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: Snow Hill was built (or rebuilt) between 1799 and 1801. As discussed in Samuel Snowden's will (dated September 7, 1800), the former Snowden residence on this property burned and this house was, at that time, being built. A codicil to the will signed on June 19, 1801, days prior to Samuel's death, provided additional money for the house's ongoing reconstruction (Will T 1:473, admin. 1810). A question is raised, however, by the inscriptions which appear on two of the bricks at the river front elevation to the north of the doorway, "GW 1786" and "SS 1786" (presumably for Samuel Snowden). This would suggest that the previous house did not burn to the ground but was rebuilt using the existing exterior walls. If so, this would also help explain the relatively late use of this style of architecture.

2. Original and subsequent owners:

- 1801 Will, T 1:473, Administration #1810, exhibited
7 September 1801
Samuel Snowden
To
Samuel Snowden (Jr., son)
Part of "Birmingham Manor" containing 1,113
acres of land
- 1823 Administration #1810, dated 14 October 1823
Samuel Snowden (Jr.) estate, administered by
Samuel C. Snowden. Samuel died intestate
leaving his property to be divided among his
following children: Samuel C., Mary, Sarah,
Martha, Joseph and Rebecca Snowden.
- 1865 Deed FS 2:593, 15 May 1865
Mary S. Tyson and Sarah Snowden
To
Benjamin H. Alsop and Sarah J. Alsop, his
sister
"Snowden's New Birmingham Manor" 550 acres.
Being the land awarded to Rebecca Snowden in
the division of the real estate of Samuel
Snowden, and which at the death of the said
Rebecca Snowden was inherited by the said Mary
S. Tyson and Sarah Snowden as her heirs at
law. Also, in part, the real estate awarded
to Sarah Snowden and Mary S. Tyson by Thos.
Lanahan, trustee (presumably their inheritance
from their father, Samuel Snowden).
- 1875 Will ?, 14 July 1875 (referenced in Equity
#1873)
Sarah J. Alsop
To
Benjamin H. Alsop
To Benjamin during his life, all her lands
with the remainder to his son, Edward W. Alsop
- 1885 Deed JWB 5:200, 11 June 1885
Benjamin H. Alsop, and Margaret W. Alsop
To
John Alsop, of Town of Brooklyn, ...Wisconsin
Snowden's New Birmingham Manor, 374 3/4 acres
- 1885 Administration (Noted in Equity #1873)
John Alsop

- To
Thomas J. Alsop, son and only heir at law of
John Alsop, who died intestate
- 1890 Deed JWB 17:209, 9 December 1890
Thomas J. Alsop and Frances E. Alsop, of
Brooklyn, Wisconsin
To
Henry C. Borden, of Washington, D.C.
- 1893 Deed JB 3:362, 6 July 1893
Charles C. Stanley, assignee of the mortgage
from Henry C. Borden
To
Henry M. Talbott
- 1907 Deed 38:552, 16 February 1907
H. Maurice Talbott, Attorney
To
Anna W. Frye
- 1907 Deed 39:105, 13 March 1907
Anna W. Frye and James Frye of Prince George's
County
To
Rozier Dulaney of Washington, D.C.
"Snowden's New Birmingham Manor" 367 acres
- 1909 Deed 50:439, 3 March 1909
Rozier Dulaney of Washington D.C.
To
Alice Herbert McCauley of Washington, D.C.
"Snowden's New Birmingham Manor" 367 acres
- 1940 Deed 578:426, 28 September 1940
Alice H. McCauley and John McCauley
To
Bryan P. Warren and Linnie Warren
"Snowden's New Birmingham Manor" 367 acres

3. Builder: Snow Hill was built either by or for Samuel Snowden. Similarities between the various Snowden family homes Snow Hill, Montpelier, Snowden Hall and Oaklands would suggest that they were actually built and/or designed by the Snowdens, or by the same builder.

4. Original plans and construction: No original plans exist. It is assumed that the house originally had the same basic plan as it does now. A clue as to the early

floor plan is found in the administration to Samuel Snowden's 1801 estate (Admin #1810). An inventory of his personal property gives a room-by-room listing as follows (from attic, downward): Garrett, Hall Chamber, Back Room Chamber, Lodging Room Chamber, Passage Chamber, Hall, Dining Room, Lodging Room, Passage, and cellar (out house below stairs, out house up stairs, meat house and kitchen also mentioned). This suggests the basic floor plan of the current dwelling of four rooms up and four rooms down, with an attic and cellar.

5. Alterations and additions: A log kitchen building was once attached to the south side of the main block, the ghost of which is still visible. It was later replaced by the one-story addition which appears in the 1936 HABS photographs. This addition has since been removed as well. The house was restored and modernized by Dr. and Mrs. Bryan Warren after they purchased it in 1940. Care was taken to preserve the existing character of the house. The restoration design was undertaken by architect Byard Turnbull. The walls of some of the rooms (particularly on the second floor) were brought out to provide closets. The doors and hardware for these were careful reproduced from originals in the house. Both the attic and basement were finished by the Warrens.

B. Historical Context:

Snow Hill is one of a number of fine brick dwelling houses built in Laurel by the prominent Snowden family during the mid- to late-18th century. The Snowdens were the original settlers of this area. They developed and dominated the local business--and thus the economy of the area--even before the actual founding of the town of Laurel. Richard Snowden first immigrated to Calvert County from Wales in 1658. From 1676 to 1685 he received 1,976 acres. By 1690, he had settled on his property and erected a home on the Patuxent River, southeast of the current town of Laurel in what is currently Howard County.

His son, Richard, Jr., (Captain Richard Snowden), continued to increase the family landholdings so that his son, Richard III, inherited 27,000 acres in Prince George's, Montgomery, Howard and Anne Arundel Counties. It was Captain Richard Snowden who (along with four others) started the Patuxent Iron Works, the first in the state, in 1726. The Snowden family later constructed

mills--first a grist mill in 1811, later converted to a large cotton mill in 1824. Their mill became the town's primary industry, employing hundreds and was so important to Laurel's economy that Laurel was known as "Laurel Factory." Thus, the Snowden's mining and milling interests were responsible for the creation of Laurel.

Samuel Snowden, the man who is responsible for the construction of Snow Hill, was the son of Richard Snowden III. Samuel inherited approximately 6,000 acres in Prince George's and Anne Arundel Counties, as well as one-third of his father's interest in the iron works. He was born in 1727, and died in 1801, leaving his estate--according to his will--to his six living children, Philip, Samuel, Jr., Ann (Hopkins), Henrietta, Mary (Cowman) and Sarah (Hopkins), and two granddaughters, Elizabeth and Rachael Snowden, the children of his deceased son, Richard.

To his son, Samuel, he bequeathed, "All my lot and parcel of land whereon my Dwelling House was burnt ... the aforesaid being part of 'Birmingham Manor' containing 1,113 acres of land" along with "all my household furniture of every kind, together with my stock.... and all other utensils belonging to the said plantation." Evidently, the house was still under reconstruction at the time of Samuel's death in 1801. A codicil added to his will just days before his death, dated June 19, 1801, provided for additional funds for the reconstruction. As stated, "...a sum not exceeding 500 pounds (including the sum of 125 pounds which I have already engaged to pay) for the purpose of being laid out and expended in procuring materials for, and for the rebuilding and refitting of my late dwelling House which was burnt and which I have devised aforesaid to my son Samuel..." (Will, T #1:473, Administration 1810).

As mentioned, exterior bricks with the inscriptions "GW 1786" and "SS 1786" suggest that the previous house did not burn to the ground but was in fact rebuilt. An account in the Gazette May 3, 1764, stated that, "On April 26 just passed, which was a windy day, a new large brick dwelling house belonging to Mr. Samuel Snowden, near Snowden Iron Works, took fire from sparks from the chimney falling on the roof, and the house was burned to the ground." Thus, the current house was most likely rebuilt from a dwelling constructed sometime after 1764.

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A room-by-room inventory of the household furnishings is also given in the administration of Samuel's estate in 1801. The rooms are listed as follows: garrett, hall chamber, back room chamber, lodging room chamber, passage chamber, hall, dining room, lodging room, passage (and possibly a "back room" over which the back room chamber was located?), and cellar. Also mentioned are "out house below stairs," "out house up stairs," (the contents of which--including a desk, table, clock--suggest a farm office), the meat house and the kitchen (Will T 1:473).

The names given to the rooms, as well as the furniture listed in each, reveals much about the intended use, and the life style of the period. The use of a hall and a dining room reflects the evolution of the 18th-century house form from the more multi-use hall-and-parlor to one refined to meet a more complex social structure, separating social space from family space. The earlier hall was a multi-purpose living and working space, which later became the more formalized entertaining room with the addition of dining rooms and passages by the mid-18th century. The "dining room"--more aptly described as a dining parlor--then becomes the heart of the family's living space. This is supported by the inventory which lists in the hall a desk, dining table, small tea table, eight chairs, one large looking glass and china in cupboard. In the dining room is found a desk and bookcase, a breakfast table, tea table, one dozen windsor chairs, a looking glass and china in cupboard. Thus, there is little difference between the furnishing of the hall and dining rooms. Presumably, the difference is in the quality rather than the type of furnishings, and who uses them.

Samuel Snowden, Jr., died intestate in 1823. The administration of his estate gives a personal inventory only, but lists his heirs as the following children: Samuel C. (the executor), Mary, Sarah, Martha, Joseph and Rebecca Snowden. According to a survey made of the division of the real estate of Samuel Snowden (not found, but evident from the chain-of-title, and there is a receipt from Lloyd Adamson for the surveying and dividing up of the lands of Samuel Snowden in Admin. #1810) Sarah Snowden inherited her father's dwelling house. Sarah Snowden and her sister, Mary S. Tyson, conveyed the property to Benjamin Alsop, and his sister, Sarah A. Alsop of Cayuga County, New York, in May of 1865 (Deed FS 2:593).

Sarah Alsop was a teacher at the nearby Muirkirk school, established by Charles Coffin, owner of the Muirkirk Iron Furnace. A community of workers' housing--known as Muirkirk--developed around the iron furnace, which was one of the few employers of blacks in the county (most were engaged in tenant farming). The school was significant because it taught black as well as white children. Sarah Alsop had been sent here by the New England Association, a beneficial society based in Boston, Massachusetts. Beneficial societies such as this one developed out of the Freedmen's Bureau (instituted by an act of Congress in 1865) following the Civil War. Their mission was to assist blacks in establishing schools and hospitals, finding jobs, and providing aid in the form of food, clothing, etc. (Floyd, pgs. 25-27).

Sarah Alsop died in 1873, leaving her share of the real estate to her brother, Benjamin, and thereafter, to his son, Edward. Benjamin and his wife, Margaret, presumably had relocated here as their grantor deed in 1885 gives their place of residence as Prince George's County. Benjamin Alsop also appears here on the Hopkins Atlas of 1878. Benjamin and Margaret conveyed title to the property to John Alsop of Brooklyn, Wisconsin, in June of 1885 (Deed JWB 5/200). John Alsop died, however, shortly thereafter, leaving the property to his son and only heir, Thomas J. Alsop. The property was probably tenanted (perhaps even by Benjamin Alsop who was later in dispute over the property with Thomas Alsop, Equity #1873) as two equity cases and Thomas' eventual grantor deed gave his residence as Brooklyn, Wisconsin.

In December of 1890 Thomas and his wife, Francis Alsop, conveyed the property to real estate investors H. Maurice Talbott (a Rockville attorney) and a silent partner by the name of McEwen (Henry C. Borden, who appears on the first deed, JWB 17:209 was Mr. McEwen's clerk). The farm was then tenanted by Mr. Samuel Green. A later conflict over the property--and the suggestion that Talbott had "been had" by McEwen--resulted in an equity suit and the property's eventual sale. According to testimony in the equity proceedings in 1897, the Snow Hill farm had evidently suffered from being tenanted. It was stated that, "the dwelling is not tolerable and all of the buildings are out of repair" (Equity #2265), and land values in this area had decreased considerably.

Thus, Snow Hill--in its reduced state--passed through a succession of owners. All were of Washington, D.C., and

evidently absentee owners who tenanted the property. Thus, it was stated that when the current owners purchased Snow Hill in 1940, the house was in a deteriorating state and had served as a "neglected farmhouse and even a barn" (Poe, p. 71). It was purchased by Dr. Bryan P. Warren and his wife, Virginia (Linnie), in September of 1940. The Warrens proceeded to undertake the restoration and renovation of Snow Hill, hiring architect Byard Turnbill to develop plans in keeping with the historic character of the house. The Warrens originally farmed the property themselves, planting corn. The growing fields are now tenanted. Snow Hill is now the home of their son, Morris Warren.

James C. Wilfong, Jr., who wrote on the county's historic architecture for the *Prince George's Post*, said of the Snowdens and their dwellings, "They were Englishmen and the homes they erected were built in the English manner and styling, tempered perhaps by the few Maryland adaptations to the Tidewater way of life." He, in addition, stated "this remarkable family were builders of great talent and each left his cultural mark upon the home he erected... at the height of the Snowden dynasty perhaps a dozen of their notable structures dotted the area and their existence noted both culture and elegance" (Wilfong, in Poe, p. 13 & 17).

Snow Hill is one of five Snowden dwellings now remaining in the Laurel area (including Montpelier, Oatlands, Snowden's Walnut Grange and Snowden Hall). These and a few others (now gone) were once part of a vast Snowden plantation. As time passed, the large tract was eventually divided up as the inheritances of later family members. As the value of farm land in this area decreased, Snow Hill became a tenant farm. Eventually, with the coming of the railroad and increased commercialization, Laurel would grow and this area would be developed by suburban homes and shopping centers. Thus, Snow Hill has gone from early settlement plantation house, to farm house, tenant house, and finally to country house surrounded by suburban development.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Snow Hill follows the tradition of Southern Tidewater architecture. Because

many of Prince George's County's early settlers migrated here from southern Maryland, this architectural type--with its one-and-a-half story, gambrel roof configuration--was once fairly common. It was generally executed in wood frame, however, and has therefore infrequently stood the test of time. Thus, this once-common form is now rarely seen. It is similar in size and plan to the Snowden family's Oatlands (later raised to a full two stories) near Snow Hill. (Snow Hill also resembles Clifton (1842) in nearby Ashton, Montgomery County, a home of the Thomas family who intermarried with the Snowdens.) Snow Hill has a number of interesting interior details including a stairway laid out like that of Montpelier, corner cupboards with keystone arched openings, mantels and iron hearths which may have come from the Patuxent Iron Works.

2. Condition of fabric: Snow Hill appears to be in very good condition, with many original architectural features intact.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Snow Hill is a one-and-a-half-story, five-bay-by-two-bay gambrel-roofed structure, measuring 50'-0" x 35'-0", with nearly identical east and west facades.

2. Foundations: The house rests on a Flemish-bond brick foundation.

3. Walls: The walls are of brick laid in Flemish bond (evidence of an earlier wing can be seen in the brickwork at the south side wall). There is a molded brick water table. There are two inscribed bricks at the east elevation (near door) which read "GW 1786" and "SS 1786."

4. Structural systems, framing: It is of load-bearing masonry construction. The roof framing consists of common rafters with lapped joints at the ridge, with collars lapped over the rafters (probably not original).

5. Porches, stoops: The same pedimented portico appears at both the east and west entries. This portico is different from the one that appears in the 1936 HABS photographs (no pediment) and was therefore probably part of the Warren's restoration/renovation. The simple pediment, with scotia molding along the top pieces, is supported by two turned posts, and there are built-in

benches to either side. The porch rests on a brick foundation, elevated a few steps.

6. Chimneys: Snow Hill has an interior brick chimneys at each gable end. They are wide (serving two fireplaces on each floor), with decoratively corbelled tops.

7. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: There are three doorways, one to the center of each of the east front and west rear facades--or river and carriage fronts--and one to the west end of the south-side wall (a later addition). There was another doorway at the south side (at the east end) which lead into the old kitchen building, now gone. This doorway was replaced with a window during the restoration. At the north end, the lintel of the closed-off basement entrance can be seen. The east and west doorways are slightly recessed, surrounded by a wooden frame with a slightly shouldered, beveled edge. They have wood paneled doors. The side doorway has a plain wooden surround and a flat-arched brick lintel.

b. Windows: The windows on the first story, east and west facades, are asymmetrically balanced with the three center bays grouped together, and one spaced further, to either side. They are nine-over-nine-light-sash windows with a simple, narrow wooden architrave surround and flat-arched brick lintels. There are high basement windows also at the east and west facades. They are small, arched, rectangular two-light casement windows with wooden surrounds, two to either side of the center entry. The windows at the sides, and in the dormers, are six-over-six-light-sash. In the gable end, to either side of the chimney block, is a small four-light casement window.

8. Roof:

a. Shape, covering: The house has a gambrel roof covered with wooden shingles.

b. Cornice, eaves: There is a simple molded cornice along the east and west facades. The gable ends of the roof are flush with the walls, outlined with a flat, narrow wooden board.

c. Dormers: There are five dormers at each of the east and west facades. The dormers have shed roofs and six-over-six-light-sash windows.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

a. First floor: Snow Hill has a Georgian floor plan consisting of a center hall with two rooms to either side. There is a doorway at either end of the center hall (accessing both the river and carriage fronts of the house). The center hall has an inset to the rear north side to accommodate a stairway. The northwest parlor has a fireplace and a built-in cupboard at the north wall. There is a doorway which joins this room with a smaller chamber to the northwest. This room also has a fireplace at the north wall, and a doorway to the southwest where a short passage leads to the center hall. The southeast room is the dining room, with an exterior doorway, fireplace and built-in cupboard to the south wall. A doorway connects this room with the southwest room, now the kitchen. There is a fireplace, flanked by a closet and exterior doorway to the south wall, with a boxed-winder stairway in the southwest corner.

b. Second floor: The second floor follows the same basic plan as the first, with an open stair hall and four bedrooms (with a modern bath and closets added).

2. Stairways: The stairway is located in an inset at the northwest corner of the central hall. There is a single-step landing at the base of the stair, which then runs along the north wall to a second landing, and continues along the west wall to the second floor. It has a simple balustrade with a plain square newel post and balusters (probably a replacement). The second floor hall is balustraded, overlooking the stair. There is also a small boxed-winder stairway located in the southwest corner of the southwest room.

3. Wall and ceiling finish: There is chair rail throughout the house, consisting of a beaded board supporting a cyma recta molding with a projecting torus mold on top.

4. Decorative features, trim: There are Federal-style corner cupboards in the first-floor northeast and southeast rooms. They have an arched opening with keystone and are flanked by pilasters supporting a cornice molding. These rooms also have mantels with a simple architrave surround, mantel shelves and cast-iron hearths (presumably from the Snowden's Iron Works). The same mantel appears in the southwest room, and in the northwest room with dentilling below the mantel shelf.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house appears to have two identical fronts. The actual front faces the Patuxent River to the east, although the approach is from the west. There is a long, cedar-lined drive from Rt. 197 to the west, running along the south side of the property. There is a long, open field to the street front of the house, with trees clustered around the house. The property is not far from the busy intersection of Rt. 197 and Contee Road, with a shopping center to the west and an apartment complex to the south. Fortunately, Snow Hill has a reasonable set-back from the road and the environmental setting has been protected.

2. Historical landscape design: The house was designed to face the river rather than the road, so that it is approached by the drive to the rear of the house. Ancient cedars line the drive. Old plantings included ivy covering the south side elevation and a large magnolia tree at the southeast corner of the house. To the southeast of the house is an ornamental boxwood garden, with a square perimeter, circular center, and spandrels between. An old road-bed is visible to the east of the house, probably used for farm vehicles, as it leads from the site of the barn (to the southeast), into the fields.

3. Outbuildings: Only one old outbuilding remains. It is a log meat house located to the southeast of the main house. It is a small square structure with a pyramidal roof with exposed overhanging rafters. The hewn logs are V-notched with chinking between the wide spaces. It sits on a brick foundation and appears to have been moved and/or reassembled. There is also a brick, two-car garage with an apartment above, to the north of the meat house.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Early Views: Two views were previously taken by HABS photographer John O. Brostrup, on May 21, 1936. Both are of the west facade, one taken from the northwest and the other from the southwest. Two notable differences from the current structure are the south-side kitchen addition which appears in the 1936 photo (now gone), and the entry portico, which has since been replaced.

B. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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Prince George's County Land Records, Deeds and equity proceedings as cited in text.

Prince George's County Register of Wills, Wills and Administrations as cited in text.

2. Secondary and published sources:

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Historical Booklet, Centennial, 1870-1970.
Laurel: The News-Leader, 1970. With
historical article by James C. Wilfong, Jr.
(pgs. 13-18).

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of Snow Hill was undertaken as part of a cooperative project between the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Robert J. Kapsch, Chief, and the Maryland National Capital Park & Planning Commission on behalf of the Prince George's County Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) to document select sites throughout the county. A memorandum of agreement was signed in August of 1988 and the project, to span one year, was begun in January of 1989. Gail Rothrock, director and Susan G. Pearl, research historian of the HPC, made the selection of sites. They also provided access to their historical research and information on file with the HPC, as well as their extensive knowledge of county history. The large format photography was undertaken by HABS photographer Jack E. Boucher. This historical report was prepared by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie, who also accompanied the photographer into the field for on site investigation.